# HOUSTON CHRONICLE

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# A pledge to protect patients

## State lawmakers join efforts to fight surprise out-of-network medical bills

**By Jenny Deam**

Two Texas lawmakers said Tuesday they would consider changing state law to better protect patients caught in the fight between doctors and insurers.

The legislators joined a chorus this week of consumer and patient advocacy groups, along with national health policy experts, who are dismayed by a system that forces unsuspecting patients to pay significantly higher rates from out-of network doctors even at in-network hospitals.

Under a multimillion-dollar business practice called balance billing, doctors can demand that patients make up what insurance companies do not pay. In some cases, emerging evidence indicates doctors may be staying out of network intentionally to charge more and increase profits.

In Texas, unlike in other states, it is up to patients who feel wronged to initiate a billing mediation between warring doctors and insurers, potentially putting themselves in the middle.

"There's no genuine need for them to be involved," said John Smithee, R-Amarillo, former head of the House's Insurance Committee and longtime champion of patient protection against surprise out-of-network medical bills. He said he

*Mediation continues on A13*

***"This is just not right. ... These out-of-network games being played in emergency rooms are costing Texans thousands of dollars and the #txlege needs to do something about it."***
*Chronicle reader's tweet*

*›› Read the Chronicle's investigation about how patients are caught in the middle of balance billing.* **HoustonChronicle.com/blindsided**

# Trump defends Moore amid scandal

## GOP candidate 'totally denies' sexual allegations, president stresses

**By Michael Scherer, Ashley Parker and David Weigel**
WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump gave a boost Tuesday to embattled Republican candidate Roy Moore in the Alabama Senate race, warning against a Democratic victory and emphasizing that the former judge "totally denies" allegations of inappropriate relationships with teenage girls.

"We don't need a liberal person in there, a Democrat," Trump said about Moore's opponent, former federal prosecutor Doug Jones, who has led in some recent polls in the state. "I've looked at his record. It's terrible on crime. It's terrible on the border. It's terrible on military."

The comments came after a week in which other Republican leaders in Washington, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell had cut ties with Moore and called on him to exit the race. They also stood in contrast to Trump's own support for the Republican National Committee's decision last week to pull resources from the state, including 14 paid staffers and expertise in using party data to target voters and model the election result.

There were no signs Tuesday that the RNC would reverse course, but a senior administration official said the president's comments could prompt a larger effort to close ranks behind Moore.

"Normally there would be an outside group dump-

*Trump continues on A13*

### More stories

*›› U.S. Rep. John Conyers admits settling harassment complaint.* **Page A8**
*›› CBS fires TV host Charlie Rose over complaints of sexual harassment.* **Page A8**
*›› Pixar co-founder and Walt Disney Animation chief takes a leave of absence.* **Page A8**

BUSINESS

### FCC plans to ditch internet access rules

The FCC chairman plans to scrap rules around open internet access, a move that would allow giant cable and telecom companies to throttle broadband speeds and favor their own services if they wish. **Page B2**

IN MEMORIAM

**Cassidy sold millions of records at the height of his career.**

**1970s teen idol David Cassidy dies at age 67**
Cassidy was an actor and teen heartthrob best known for his role as the musician with the green eyes and feathered haircut on the 1970s sitcom "The Partridge Family." **Page A14**

CITY | STATE

**Mystery grows around death of border agent**
An FBI official says the death of a border patrol agent is being investigated as a "potential assault," but he wouldn't rule out that he could have been killed in some other way. **Page A4**

WORLD

**Zimbabwe leader ends 37-year rule**
President Robert Mugabe, 93, who once vowed to rule for life, succumbs to a week of overwhelming pressure. **Page A7**

**Venezuela detains head of U.S. refiner**
Venezuelan officials detain the acting president of Citgo, the state-owned oil company's U.S. subsidiary, and five other executives for alleged involvement in corruption. **Page B1**

MLS CUP PLAYOFFS

# DYNAMO FANS ARE LOUD AND STRONG

Yi-Chin Lee / Houston Chronicle

**El Batallon fan club marches from King's Court Bar and Kitchen on the way to BBVA Compass Stadium for the first leg of the Dynamo's Western Conference finals against the Seattle Sounders.**

## Sold-out crowd fills stadium to show that the city is behind the team

**By Maggie Gordon**

Don't tell Mannie Gutierrez to be quiet.

On Tuesday night, Gutierrez joined more than 20,000 other Houstonians in a sold-out crowd at the Dynamo's final home game of the year, screaming his throat raw in hopes that it would energize his team to a victory over Seattle Sounders FC in the first leg of the Western Conference finals.

The Dynamo have had poor fan showings all season — even as the team reached greater heights in playoffs than they have in several years. At the club's last home game, a 0-0 draw against the Portland Timbers, during the final stretch of the Astros' miracle season, one in three seats remained empty.

But now that the World Series is over, and the Dynamo are in the playoffs, the soccer club easily filled BBVA Compass Stadium on Tuesday night. And for Gutierrez, who's been present for heartbreak and heroism all season, it felt good to know the Dynamo finally have the support of the city behind them.

"The last couple years were difficult. The team wasn't doing very good," says Gutierrez, 30, who is one of the heads of the team's un-

*Dynamo continues on A14*

**MORE ON THE GAME**
*See results from the first leg of the Western Conference finals between the Dynamo and the Sounders.*
**Sports, Page C1**

# After 3 months, Harvey debris removal nears end

## As holidays approach, workers hope to offer affected residents normalcy

**By Emily Foxhall**

It was around 10:30 a.m., one week before Thanksgiving, and Brian Davis was back in the truck he'd been operating since he drove from his hometown in Alabama to Houston and started picking up Hurricane Harvey debris.

Employed by a Harris County subcontractor, Davis had been at it seven days a week, from daylight until dusk, and this day was no different. He'd left his hotel, stopped by the doughnut shop for a croissant with bacon, egg and cheese and arrived to the debris site near the Addicks Reservoir by 6:30 a.m. to start up the truck.

Then it was back to the grind. He navigated the oversized vehicle down the once-flooded Bear Hill Drive. Climbed the ladder at the back of the truck. Maneuvered an arm of the machinery to grab the trash, lift it in a cloud of dust and flies and deposit it in one of the truck's two containers. He had never spent time in Houston before. Now, he wore aviators and a recently acquired Astros hat, collecting scoop after scoop of what Harvey had ruined.

"It just keeps coming," Davis said. "It's like the never-ending story."

With help from contractors and subcontrac-

*Debris continues on A13*

Melissa Phillip / Houston Chronicle

**A debris site in the Bear Creek area last week. Crews picked up 26,094 truckloads as of Nov. 13, with 40 percent of it from the Addicks Reservoir area alone.**


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